

# Damron and KYTC receive recognition for a job well done

By: Miranda Thacker

**S**teve Damron, director of the Transportation Cabinet's right of way division, received honorable mention for leadership in the 2008 Excellence in Right of Way Awards. The award recognizes Damron and the cabinet's right of way division for proactively avoiding critical staff shortages of branch managers and skilled staff positions.

Damron has shepherded an innovative program that employs college students at KYTC district right of way offices and prepares them for future full-time employment.

Jose Sepulveda, federal highway administrator for Kentucky, presented Damron with a plaque at the awards reception in May.

Sepulveda congratulated Damron for his outstanding leadership.

With many of his division's senior employees retiring, Damron realized the division would need to be proactive in addressing personnel shortages. This year, more than half of the remaining statewide workforce will qualify for retirement.

Damron turned for help to the cabinet's partnership with the University of Kentucky Transportation Center and the Southeastern Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (SASHTO). Using a \$15,000 SASHTO grant the division set up a co-op program with 15 college seniors from campuses near the 12 district right of way offices.

Twelve of the students were hired to

learn various right of way functions, while three were focused on appraising. Students are paid an hourly rate. With satisfactory performance during the first semester, students are offered a bonus if they commit to work for the cabinet full time upon graduation.

"The co-op program not only has given

this group of students the opportunity to learn job skills but has also given the Transportation Cabinet a group of well educated and experienced applicants to choose from as we meet the challenges of statewide retirements," Damron said. "The publicity generated from recent news articles has also sparked a lot of interest."

Damron said students in the program

will benefit from being trained by long-term, knowledgeable personnel and will help fill future vacancies in the right of way division.

Transportation Secretary Joe Prather commended Damron for his efforts. "With each retirement, we lose a lifetime of knowledge that's hard to replace," Prather said. "Steve's work will help steady our staffing levels and provide a stream of talent as we search for potential applicants in the future."

The program is being refined to continue indefinitely, with six to eight additional students per year and the creation of a full tuition-based scholarship.

The cabinet hopes to continue the program under the current partnership with the Kentucky Transportation Center as a co-op program. □



**Steve Damron receives award from FHWA**